

# ラブライブ!

*School idol diary*



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# Love Live! School Idol Diary: Honoka Kousaka

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## 01 - Honoka Will Not Give Up

I'm Honoka Kousaka, 16 years old.

I'm a second-year student at Otonokizaka Academy.

And, I'm part of the school idol group  $\mu$ 's, which is currently a huge hit!

Well, I wish I could say that, but honestly, is that really true? Ah, ahahaha, hah.

Ack, I shouldn't be writing this.

Don't start giving up when you've only just started, Honoka! Yeah.

Okay, let's do that again, with feeling!

I'm Honoka Kousaka, age 16.

I've decided to make my school idol debut together with my friends this April.

Honestly, we might be a bit too... normal... to be calling ourselves "idols," though.

I mean, we look normal, we're not good singers, either, we don't have any acting skill, and when you look at our pictures, we've all got these nervous, uncomfortable smiles, or we're flashing peace signs like stereotypical high school girls fooling around.

Hm, but... wait a minute, didn't I just tell myself that idols shouldn't be getting discouraged? That's right!

Yeah, that's why we're going to become the shining idols that everyone dreams of being, and we're going to do our best, and get everyone's attention, and we'll save our school, Otonokizaka Academy, from shutting down. I swear it!

I really, really want everyone to support us.

Because...

The school we're going to, the school we love so much, that we've always wanted to go to, ever since we were little, has been sentenced to the cruel fate of being shut down in three years.

Our school, Otonokizaka Academy, is a local public school in the neighborhood we were born in. Oh, but when I say public, I mean it's technically a "national" school, but it's far from all the train stations, so maybe that's why basically all the students are local girls, and it's not like it has any strong clubs or

cutting-edge education, so it's completely different from the smart, elegant image you'd get when you hear the words, "national school."

Umi, my childhood friend since before we were born, says that the locals don't have the budget to keep a school open here, but it would be unacceptable to have it go away, leaving a region in the capital city without any high schools, so they just started calling it a national school instead of shutting it down.

She sure is the daughter of a long line of martial artists. She knows all this hard stuff, huh?

I'm dumb, so I don't know any of this hard stuff, or these adult matters, but what I do know is how important Otonokizaka Academy is and always has been to the people who live here. It's the center of our neighborhood.







Tokyo city, Chiyoda ward. Akihabara, Kanda, Jinbocho, and Ochanomizu. Amidst these places, where people from all over Japan gather, lies our quiet little neighborhood, like a small brown valley surrounded by urban buildings.

Oh, actually, maybe there's not enough dirt to call it a brown valley, huh? But, when I was little, there were even less buildings than right now. It was such a relaxing neighborhood, filled with open spaces, parks, and sunlight.

Of course, I don't know the truth, but according to my grandma who lives with me, this is one of the few cities that wasn't burned down by bombers during the Pacific War (!?).

It's true that when you walk through these streets, what you'll see are old buildings and many long-standing stores.

There's the famous soba store and Western-style sweets shop that my grandma loves, which appeared in Shoutarou Ikenami's books, the Western restaurant that the great author who showed up in our textbooks, Souseki Natsume, liked going to, and a makizushi shop with delicious inari sushi. There's the *ryoutei* with young ladies in kimonos coming in and out all day and the traditional Tokyo-style ramen shop run by twin old ladies with crooked backs.

In this neighborhood, you can catch glimpses of these sorts of old-fashioned scenery hidden between the old buildings and wooden houses with tiled roofs.

Walk just a little bit and you'll find loads of trains and cars, but this neighborhood is the one place that's mainly pedestrians. That's how it feels.

When you think about it, it's a pretty mysterious neighborhood, huh?

But, I was born in this neighborhood, and I was raised in this neighborhood.

This neighborhood's all I've ever known.

Kindergarten, elementary school, and middle school were all public schools, of course, and the only lessons I've taken were piano lessons from one of the old ladies nearby (though I didn't practice and quit pretty quickly, ehehe♡), abacus classes behind the park, oh, and calligraphy lessons from Umi's uncle.

Oh, and my favorite were the swimming lessons at the community center's heated pool!

When school ended, we just found a place to play dodgeball or tag. Riding the trains was an opportunity that came only once in a long, long while, like maybe when you begged your mom forever to go to the movies over summer or spring vacation.

So, even though we live in the Chiyoda ward, you can't really call us city folk, huh?

We lived our days inside a 500-meter radius. Hehe.

But, that's why I've never, ever known that our neighborhood was relatively urban. And, even though this neighborhood is right in the middle of the city, the number of children keeps dropping, and there's been worries about the population.

I never knew a thing about it.

I was completely clueless, lost in my own world.

Now that I think about it, I realize how stupid it was.

But, I always thought that this neighborhood, the laid-back, sunlight-filled neighborhood that I loved so much, would stay this way forever.

That's why I thought that when I grew up, and became a high-schooler, I'd finally be like those big girls I saw around the neighborhood, and I'd get to go to Otonoki and live a shiny, wonderful high school life.



Now, about Otonokizaka Academy, the school building and its equipment are completely normal, the students are normal, and even the uniforms, even though I really like them, the blue blazer and checkered skirt are incredibly normal, so, hmmm... if I had to say, the one special thing about it is that even though it's in the middle of the city, its grounds are spacious and full of green?

Oh, and also, there's relatively few students, so there's a lot of room. That's about it, huh?

But, since I lived my entire life here, I always thought that when I grew up, I'd definitely wear the Otonoki uniform, and become an Otonoki student!

Why? It's not like I had any fantastic memories of some encounter with one of the big girls from Otonoki, or any other sort of inspiration.

But, still my neighboring classmates had sisters who went to Otonoki, and around the neighborhood, I'd see them laughing together, and having a good time. It was such a familiar sight to me ever since I was little, and I simply wanted to be like them.

Doesn't that happen to everyone?

Even though it's not any sort of special school, and it's not hard to get into, even though it's just a normal local public high school, the sort of school you'd be able to get into just by living your life normally, still...

It's an exciting future, always in front of you, but never within reach until the time truly comes.

It was the school I always, always wanted to go to.

I thought that when I grew up, I'd definitely become like one of those big girls.

Now that I think about it, maybe it's also because there were so few people, too?

Regardless of the time period, the big girls in the Otonokizaka uniforms were relaxed, and unlike those flashy high school girls that you see on TV. They seemed so nice, and were always fun, and it felt like they got some sort of special treatment from the people in the neighborhood.

That must be why, to my eyes, those girls looked like the central figures of the neighborhood.

Those big girls, in their neat, slightly mature-looking blue uniforms were my role models.

Well, maybe I don't really seem like a big girl right now, though. Ehehe.

And, that's why I still can't believe it.

Otonokizaka Academy, which I've always wanted to go to, is in danger of being shut down.

I can still see it when I think about it.

With a bit of help from Umi and Kotori, I managed to survive my remedial classes over spring break, and began my second year of high school in spring.

Once you're a second year, you've already finished your first year in a new school, and you don't have to worry about college exams, so it's the best year to play around, right?

And, the weather was so good that morning, it was like the gods were celebrating me, so I was so excited to start enjoying my high school life as I headed off to school that morning.

When I met Kotori and Umi, I greeted them with a big smile, saying, "It's a wonderful day today!"

And then...

With nervous looks on their faces, the two of them took me to the bulletin board, where a notice for the school's closure was posted.

Aaaaagh, come on!

Just remembering it now makes my chest hurt.

There's that phrase, "I can't believe my own eyes," but at that time, that's literally what I was experiencing. It couldn't be real, right? No way, that's impossible. Every word of disbelief I knew went flying through my head, and I reflexively pinched my cheek.



Maybe it was because I was so surprised, but it felt fluffy, and I hardly even felt any pain.

So, I thought, *I knew it! This must be a dream, then!* And my head kept spinning. I'm not sure what I was thinking, and the next thing I knew, I was sitting at my desk in my classroom.

In front of me, I saw the worried faces of Umi and Kotori.

"Are you okay, Honoka?" asked Kotori.

When I saw their worried faces. I finally realized, oh, this is reality.

"Closing..."

That meant that my beloved Otonokizaka Academy was going to disappear from this world.

Eventually, there wouldn't be a single student left in this huge school building, and the big girls in their school uniforms, who I'd always took for granted as a part of life in our neighborhood, would disappear too.

Oh! And besides, if that really happened, then what would happen to the two whole years of high school I had left!? What should I do? I had failing grades last year, and I really don't think I can salvage myself and test into another school at this point, I thought.

Then, Kotori, giving me a look of pity and a faint smile, told me, "It seems you won't have to worry about that. The school won't actually close for another three years, after all the current students have graduated."

Oh, right then.

Exhausted, I sank into my chair.

But, it seems I said my thoughts out loud, and shot out of my seat.

"Three years?"

Being caught unawares twice in one day left me completely drained.

Despite all efforts, our Otonoki was going to shut down due to falling enrollment, but it would only shut down for real after 3 years, so no current students would be affected.

It felt long but short, short but long. Three years.

One full run of high school.

Well, it's true that we won't be in this school after three years.

No matter how hard I try to stay, I'm naturally going to graduate in 3 years.

Although I don't know whether I'll be going to college or working by then, this won't be my problem anymore at that point, and I won't be in any position to speak out against shutting the school down.

But, even so...

Am I fine with this?

As long as it works for me, as long as I can graduate, then that's fine? I really can't bring myself to think that way.

Why is Otonoki closing?

It's impossible.

Otonoki's been a natural part of our life for so long, and now it's just going to disappear from the world?

I... I don't want that!

Heat started to build up inside my eyes a little.

When I told Umi and Kotori, who were in front of me, they seemed a bit uncomfortable.

Kotori's mom is the director of the school, so maybe it would cause some problems for me to say that.

But, still, this is wrong. They can't just shut down the school like this, without even asking us students.

I know that the school is run by the adults, but still!

This school, our Otonokizaka Academy, belongs to the students who actually go to school here, doesn't it? If our precious school's getting shut down, well, we're not just gonna sit around and do nothing!

If we knew that our school was getting shut down, there might have been more that we could have done...



I mean, they just put up this “closing notice” on the bulletin board right as if it were completely normal, right next to things like “Recruiting Library Volunteers” and stuff. Like, isn’t that ridiculous? If someone were as carefree as me, and just never looked at the bulletin board ever, they’d be in a real mess when one day, the school just closed all of a sudden! Seriously, that’s just ridiculous! Hm, I’m getting filled with energy again! There must be something I can do. For my school. And that’s why Honoka will never, ever give up.

So, this is what I believe.  
If it’s for something important to you, someone important to you, something you truly want...  
Then you shouldn’t ever give up.  
No matter what, just don’t give up, never give in, keep trying, and your dreams will definitely come true.  
No matter how minor it is.  
As long as you’re going forward, even just a little bit at a time, that’s all you need.  
Because even when someone’s climbing a mountain so high, it fills your vision and reaches the clouds, they go one step at a time.  
Thinking only about what’s in front of me, and heading towards my goal is the only thing I can do.  
Although it’s not like I’m not afraid I’ll be on the road forever, at those times, I think to myself...  
I can’t stop now.  
If I stop now, I won’t be able to go anymore.  
At times like these, the hardest times, the most painful times, that, more than any other time, is when I need to bite down, and push even one millimeter forward.  
I won’t lose as long as I’m making progress.  
That’s how I always think.  
But, if I give up, then it ends right there.  
Life is very simple.  
When I say that stuff, people laugh at me and call me a sports girl. But, I’m not going to join a sports club, okay?  
No, because... I’m going to start an idol club... No, a school idol club!  
I’ll sing, dance, be cute, and shine, and attract everyone’s attention, and then, make Otonokizaka Academy’s application numbers soar as a true idol!



Well, this kinda turned out longer than I thought it’d be, so I’ll wrap it up here, and write the next part in tomorrow’s entry. About why I decided to become a school idol. What my reason was, and what makes them fascinating.  
One day, when I actually become a famous idol, I hope I can release this diary to the public, and let everyone read it. And I want everyone to know the emotions I can’t tell them just from my performances.  
I really wish for that day to come soon!  
And, with that prayer, I’ll go to sleep for the night. Let’s all practice hard tomorrow!  
From, Honoka.

Comments♥Kotori

I really do hope the day we get to let everyone read this diary will come soon. It's filled with Honoka's emotions. I think if people read it, then they'll understand us so much more♥ I love Otonoki just like Honoka does, too! Let's keep on doing our best with μ's, forever and ever.





## 02 - Let's Become School Idols

I still can't really forget the excitement I felt when I read the words "school idol" for the first time.

It was like an excitement like a first love.

Well, I haven't had a first love yet, but that's probably what it feels like. Ehehe♡

So, while I don't know for sure, what I do know is, that must have been the first time for me.

My chest tightened up, I couldn't breathe, my heart started beating fast, and when I looked at that person, it was like my gaze was being pulled towards them, and I couldn't turn away.

I got so excited, my body felt like it would start dancing on its own.



Right?

So that's like, basically love, right?

I must have fallen in love with school idols.

I just can't sit still. So, instead of confessing my love...

I've decided to become a school idol too. I'll become a school idol, and fight for Otonokizaka Academy's sake.



What school idols are is a type of club that's been the latest craze among high school girls nationwide. There are several different types. Some are clubs formally recognized by the school, while others are kind of guerilla-style, where girls volunteer for it and their activities have no connection to school events. Girls who want to become idols, but think that trying to become a real idol is setting the bar too high, perform their own idol activities and get people to come watch them, that's the sort of thing that's popular now.

Basically, it's like going, "Look at me, I'm an idol now!"

See, when you think of idols, it used to be these super cute girls who show up in TV and media, who were selected out of who knows how many tens of thousands of other girls, or they won a dance competition, or they sent their pictures in to magazines, or they have any other reason why people would want to pay attention to them. These are the girls you'd really think are special.

But, even if you don't have the right skills, or luck, or environment (Like, if you don't live near a big city like Tokyo, you don't stand a chance of becoming a celebrity, right? Oh, actually, we live in the city too, even though it doesn't feel like it. Ahaha.), in these times, you can use the net and stuff to become an amateur idol. That's the idea behind these grassroots idols.

Hm, yeah, the first person to come up with this idea must have been a total genius, right!?

I definitely think so.

They can't compare to professional songs, choreography, or outfits, and typically, it's rare for them to dance in front of a large audience. Most groups just have special performances at sports festivals, or a slot in culture festivals. But, I don't think being an idol is about being on TV or in magazines.

The desire to be an idol.

The desire for you yourself to become an amazing idol and to shine. That's what makes girls into idols.

Maybe it's strange for me to say that, but that's what I really think.

All you need is a single outfit, one song, and a little bit of dancing.

You can just copy an existing idol. That's fine.

Even if nobody's watching you at first, as long as you have faith, and keep being an idol, someday, people will come. Isn't that right?

Just look at this. Ta-dah!

All you need is one PC to upload a self-made video onto the best friend of any grassroots movement, an online video-sharing site, and you can get people you don't even know to watch you!

There's even school-idol-only popularity voting sites, so even if your idol activities are limited to a single school or a single region, everyone has a fair chance to get people from all over the world to know them.



And that's why I thought, this is it!

I'll become one of these school idols, and get everyone to watch me.

Then, if I can tell them about Otonokizaka Academy closing down...

If everyone gets interested in Otonoki because of this, then maybe we'll get more applicants, too?

If any middle schoolers around here are thinking, what should I do? Our local Otonoki's too normal, so maybe I should go somewhere else, that might get them to reconsider. And, even people from far away might think, I'm a high schooler now, I might as well ride the trains and go to school at Otonokizaka Academy. Otonoki's a

national school, so the tuition's cheap, too!

I really am just a normal girl.

Even here at Otonokizaka Academy, I still don't particularly stand out. No matter how hard I want to stop my school from closing down, I don't think I can get that done right away.

So, when I came up with this idea, I thought I was such a genius! I was so happy, I started freaking out. I wanted to do a backflip, but I don't know how, so I just jumped around and shouted, hooray!

And then, I immediately went to recruit my childhood friends Umi and Kotori.  
At first, their faces were like, "No freakin' way!" and they weren't too eager about it, but they ended up joining me anyway, and we got into all sorts of incidents... but that's a different story. I'll talk about that stuff later, okay?

Anyway, that's how my school idol activities got started.

There's all sorts of groups all over Japan, and sometimes, I'm surprised by what I see on the net.  
From Okinawa in the south all the way to Hokkaido in the north, there's so many school idols with shining smiles!

They're all so cute, and every one of their outfits is so elaborate, it makes me even happier just looking at them♡

And now, at this moment, I'm thinking I've gotta work hard so I don't get outdone.

Yeah, our school idol group, μ's, is also gonna work hard and definitely, totally revive Otonoki!

But, as I'm thought about this,

A question came into my mind.

So, what sort of activities are school idols supposed to do, anyway???

Looking at the other school idols on the net, they write about making clothes, practicing, composing songs, and all sorts of fancy stuff.

Wow, oh my gosh, I'm gonna start doing that, too! I thought, but then I stopped.

How do I even...

How do you do these activities?

First is clothes making... Hm, I'm actually not so good at sewing.

Or, to be honest, I have no idea how to make an outfit that cute. A store-bought one... would definitely not be okay. But, even if I wanted to make one, I couldn't even do a straight gather for the simplest apron in my home ec class. Argh, what do I do? Just thinking about this is making my head hurt. Okay, let's move on, then.

So, uh, next is practice, huh?

Okay, I think I can do this! Think of some choreography for a song, then practice dancing. That's all, right? While I'm not what you'd call confident in my dancing, I do love it quite a lot. Even in my normal life, whenever something good happens, I just feel like dancing, and anyway I just love moving my body! And whenever I participate in the bon dance at the summer festival, I always find it surprisingly fun. I'm also pretty good at those taiko games at the arcade, and... Huh? That's not what we're talking about?

Uh, ignore that, then. Ahem!

So then, the next problem has to be... composing songs, huh? We can dance all we want, and make all the clothes we want, but in the end, if we don't have any songs, then none of it even matters.

Personally, I'm thinking an idol-style, bright, energetic, and happy song would be best. Like, you just hear it and it makes you feel happy.

Hmm...

Hmm...

Huh? What what what?

How do you get a song like that, anyway?

Hold on, I've never even composed a song before!!





Faced with a situation that's never even crossed my mind before, I panicked and started thinking. Hm, this idol thing, I still think that was a pretty decent idea. I mean, I am a girl, after all. I have faith that as long as I try hard, I can become an idol!♡ But, yeah... I didn't really think so much about the composing part. Sigh. I reflexively exhaled. Oh, no! Every time you sigh, a bit of happiness escapes from you. Did you know that? My grandma always told me that, ever since I was a little. That's why girls shouldn't ever sigh! You've gotta keep everyone around you happy, too.



So, I started thinking again. Maybe being a school idol is a lot more work than I thought. I might have underestimated this a bit... As I thought, I took out one of our manjuu to recharge my brain. The long-standing store Homura's famous fried manjuu. I put it in my mouth, and started chewing. Then... Ding! That's it! I've got an idea! In times like these, I should learn from someone more experienced, right?

♡♡♡♡♡

It was a holiday, so there was a long, winding line at the theater. As soon as I thought of this nice idea, I immediately got myself ready and left the house. Then, I took a 20-minute walk. I arrived at... the Akihabara UTX Theater. You've all heard of it, right? I've been explaining various things about school idols, but the idols who perform here at the Akihabara UTX Theater are the honest-to-goodness original school idols. Akihabara UTX Academy is housed inside a gigantic, brand-new skyscraper that was built in in front of Akihabara station during its redevelopment. Wow, when I looked up at the place in person, the sheer size was so imposing, it made my tummy tingle a little bit. Although this school was only built a few years ago, its luxurious campus and equipment have attracted many students to it, and it's made a name for itself around here as an up-and-coming school. It absolutely embodies the cutting-edge spirit of Akihabara, with the massive TV screen playing commercials on the front of the building, and the students going in and out just feel... digital. Just looking at it, you can see how much it contrasts with Otonoki. All the girls in Otonoki are just kinda, like, relaxed and fluttery. What's the difference, anyway? Oh, there's a lot of girls in glasses. Maybe that's it? Oh, or maybe it's because of those stylish uniforms that make them seem that way?

I shut those questions away for now, and spun to my right. There, I saw a crowd gathered at the massive skyscraper's second-floor entrance.

That's where the entrance to the theater is.

Above the entrance, painted black like a music club, there's billboard, like they have at movie theaters.

It's lit up by fancy spotlights

"Woah..."

A noise came out of my mouth. Oh, Grandma, that me gasping in awe, not sighing, okay? I'm not admitting defeat right now...

"It really is amazing, though..." I couldn't help but whisper. The size of the billboard was overwhelming.

Above me, I see three girls.

They are the shining school idol group A-RISE. They're said to be number one in both talent and popularity.

The three members are Tsubasa Kira, Erena Toudou, and Anju Yuuki.

The performing arts department is said to be UTX Academy's biggest draw, but the only those who pass this department's competitive auditions are allowed to join A-RISE. This group, A-RISE, has been the repeat winner of the annual nationwide school idol tournament Love Live! They hardly ever do appearances on TV (I don't know the details, but this is part of their "strategy", apparently...) but the performance they've refined through near-daily concerts at their permanent theater are top-notch. They say they're far more popular and talented than even current pro idols.

So, while the members of this number-one school idol group have to endure a hard practice schedule and idol activities every day, there's also no doubt that they'll immediately be able to make a proper solo debut and shine as real celebrities once they graduate.

I've heard of them, but this was the first time I've actually come to the theater in person, so I was overcome by the sight before me, and just incredibly surprised.

A fully equipped, and very expensive-looking theater, with so many fans waiting in line.

I managed to push through the crowd and approach the ticket counter.

Looking at their display, it seems there are two shows every day. Both of them were marked with the English words SOLD OUT.

"Sold out"... that means there's no more tickets, right?"

This incredible theater gets filled with people every day...?

Oh, but since there's still people here, it seems like they couldn't get a ticket, so they're waiting for a cancellation, or they're hoping to catch a glimpse of A-RISE as they're coming in or out.



Sigh...

I was trying to hold it back, but...

In the end, I couldn't help but sigh.

These are school idols. Seriously?

My chest started to hurt.

I never knew they were so... so amazing.

Maybe I was getting a bit too big for my boots, huh?

When I see it like this, becoming a school idol seems just as distant a goal as stopping Otonoki from shutting down.

I got a little bit dizzy.

For the moment, I turned my back to the UTX Theater, and walked away.

Although this isn't my style,

Although I always try not to look away, to press straight forward and take everything head on,

Sigh, my opponent this time is just too powerful!!!

The tall, dark UTX skyscraper was an imposing presence.

And, it's just too different from the flat, quiet, and faded campus of Otonoki.

The girls of A-RISE in that picture were too different from us.

The population of this side of Akihabara is too different from the population on the Otonoki side.

My chest hurt, and I felt sad.

Is this really what everyone wants?

I still like Otonoki, though.

Step, step, step, step. As I thought, I faced downwards and started walking home.  
I must have started gritting my teeth somewhere along the way. I realized that my jaw was starting to ache a little.

Letting my strength drain away, I whispered, "What am I even doing?"

"This is where you were, Honoka?"

"Oh, phew. I went to the Homura because there was a book I wanted to show you, but you weren't there."  
Suddenly, Umi and Kotori appeared before me. They're my classmates and childhood friends.

And, they're also the first members I roped into the school idol group μ's.

"O-Oh, sorry. I was going shopping in front of the station-" I started, then Kotori hopped up to me.

"Here, check this out. The latest issue of this idol magazine's a special feature on school idols. There's a story about a newly-formed unit from Okayama"

"Huh? Let me see."

Trying not to let them see my face, I quickly bury my face in the magazine Kotori hands me. Feeling Umi's gaze coming in from my side, my cheeks start to heat up.

There's a picture in Kotori's magazine.

It's a scene of a mountain, surrounded by deep green. Standing in the water of a rice paddy, there's four girls wearing cute miniskirts, with tracksuits and long boots underneath. Th-These are school idols!?

Next to them, there's a caption written in large, rounded letters.

"We'll do our best as school idols, to make our final memories here"

"The school these girls go to is about to merge with another. Soon, it'll be gone," Kotori says in a gentle voice. "But, there's been severe depopulation in the mountains, so everyone's already accepted that they can't stop their school from shutting down. So until their school closes, they're doing idol activities to leave behind proof that they were here together..."

I couldn't speak anymore.

"There's other girls like us, huh?"

"Y-Yeah."

"It makes us realize we've gotta work hard too, doesn't it!?"

"Yeah..." I manage to reply.

Umi's voice, as calm and dignified as always, approaches me. "But, we're not going to let that happen. Right, Honoka?"

Umi takes the magazine out of Kotori's hands, and slams it shut.

"Hey, I didn't save my spot yet!"

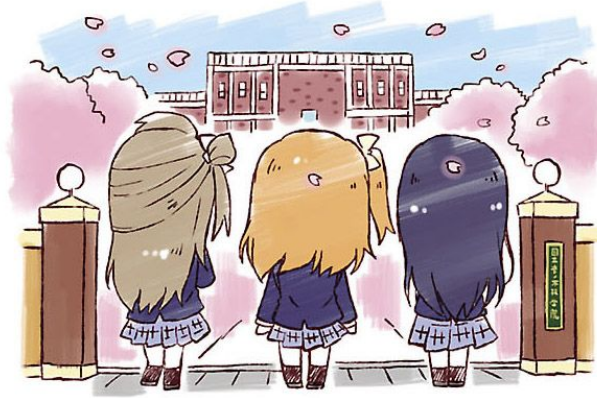
Ignoring Kotori's shouting, Umi stares into my face.

"We're not doing this to leave proof that Otonoki existed, we're doing this for the sake of Otonoki's future."

My body trembles at Umi's words.

"Y-Yeah, you're right. That's really..."

As I speak, I feel something rising up from inside me.



"That's really... yeah. I refuse to let these be our last memories of Otonoki."

The sight of UTX flashes into my mind, but I don't feel any fear anymore.

"It doesn't matter what any other schools do. We're just going to do our best, for ourselves!"

Right now, when I'm looking at Umi and Kotori in front of me, I can say it plainly.

The weak and timid Honoka that was here until now has disappeared before I even realized it.

Thanks, Umi, Kotori. Having allies really does make you stronger, huh?

And, I really do have to pay the favor back to this neighborhood, and Otonokizaka Academy for giving me these wonderful companions.

"So, since we're all here and it's the weekend, how about we have a little planning session? There's a lot more school idols in this book that Kotori bought. I was surprised to see how many there were."

"Aw, come on, Umi, a planning session? We just call this a meeting♥ Or, lately, the word buresuto has been coming into fashion these days, too. Anyway, it'd be nice if we could get into one of these magazines soon. Maybe we could bill ourselves as fighting against the closure of our school, too? Hm, but then people might think our school's really getting closed down, so nobody's going to bother applying..."

While Kotori keeps going on in her sweet, fluttery voice, I start thinking of that page I saw in the magazine.

The mountainside surrounded by deep green. The muddy rice paddy. And, in the middle of that photo, they were shining with the brightest smiles in the world.

School idols.

Hey, you girls from Kashiya Minami High School in Okayama!

In that picture of you wearing boots and miniskirts in the rice paddy, I think you looked just as cute and awesome as UTX!

So, let's keep on doing our best as school idols.

I'll keep working hard, and I'll absolutely, definitely save our school.

So, please, don't give up.

Even if it's sad and painful, no matter what happens, we need to keep on being idols who smile and bring our radiance to the people.

Even if we don't have any venues, or money, or mentors, or a club room, or even a single original song, we are school idols.

Everything begins from a perfectly blank page, right?

I swear that from now on, I'll do everything I can, and try my hardest as a school idol.

So, we should start with either a song or a club room, I guess?

Let's all discuss our ideas, okay?

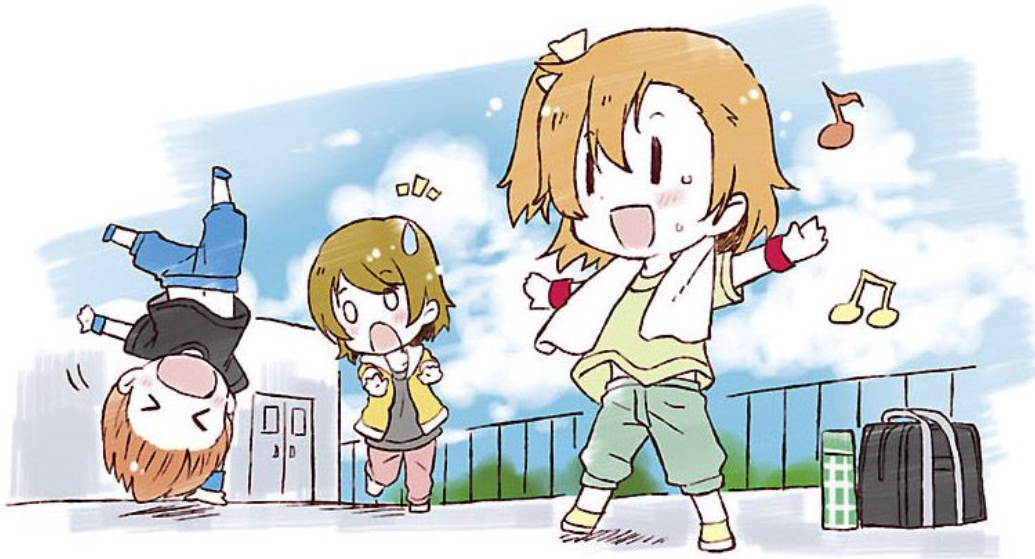
I'll do my best, yeah!



Comments♡Umi

What I like about Honoka is that she never gives up. When she first said, "I'm going to become an idol!" I wondered what was going to happen, but even if a peach or a plum remains silent, trails will lead to it all the same. And, exactly as that saying goes, I don't think I could ever defy Honoka's power when she's instinctively charging forward without ever stopping to consider what she's doing.

### 03 - Let's Dance



Ow, ow ow ow ow!  
Agh, I can't go on!  
Where's the Salonpas!?

I take a nice, cold Salonpas out of the fridge, stick it on my calf, and... Aaah! It stings! The muscle pain! It stings so bad-!

My little sister Yukiho walks past the living room after hearing me shout  
"Sis, could you quiet down!? If you have to do that, then do it in your own room! And besides, if you're getting muscle pains from copying those idol dances, then doesn't that just mean you're not getting enough exercise? If you're not careful, you might even start gaining weight. We run a manjuu shop, after all, so we've always got enough sweets to go around!"

Yukiho looks down at the table, eyeing the plate stacked high with slices of castella. Ack, those were leftovers that I took from the display shelf so I could snack on them later!

She scoffs as I try to hide them, and then goes back to her room.

What a meanie!

Man, she used to be my cute little sister, always following me around and going, "Big sister Honoka, Big sister Honoka." Where has that cute Yukiho gone now?

I mindlessly tap my hurt calf again, and agh! It's still stinging!

Sigh. This is pretty bad, huh? Will I be able to join tomorrow's practice session? Despite what Yukiho thinks, I'm not just copying idol dances. My practice today was actually pretty hard.

Following suggestions from Umi, an athletic girl who's in the kyudo and kendo clubs, we started with core training yesterday. That's 4 sets of 20 sit-ups, 4 sets of 10 push-ups, 50 laps on the staircase at the steep side of the Kanda Myojin, 100 high-knees, and so on. Honestly speaking, it's more like we're some sort of actual sports club rather than a shiny idol club! I'm betting the only reason we're not also doing bunny hops is just because Umi forgot to put those in.

Man, I've gotta try real hard so Umi doesn't suddenly remember it tomorrow.

And so, today, I'm thinking that idol activities are a lot harder than I thought they'd be.

At first, it was me with my childhood friends and classmates Umi and Kotori, and then came the first years Hanayo and Rin, and Maki with the music composition skills we'd been looking for, and then Nico also joined, and a lot of stuff happened along the way!

But, that brings us to now, and I'm thinking μ's is starting to look a lot like a real idol group.

After all, rather than doing it with a group that's already close friends from the very beginning, when we do it this way, we get more new and exciting experiences, and we can gather talents like Makkii's music composing.

And, when it comes to idol groups, it's just plain better to have all sorts of different girls who can shine in different ways, right?



Personally, when I'm getting cakes, I'd rather get one piece each of 10 different types than to get a single whole cake!

Actually, when I'm looking through the window of a cake shop, I just get so excited, I can't decide what to settle on♥

Shortcake's the classic choice, and of course, everyone loves cheesecake and chocolate cake, so we gotta have those, and the crimson red framboise mousse, and if it's the season for it, then the yellow mango cake is good too, and although it's kind of plain, the mellow flavor of the almond tart's hard to resist too, and I'd like one custard-filled cream puff, and a crunchy mille-feuille, man, just thinking about it is making me drool.

Slurp♥

So, that's why I want μ's to be a colorful team with all sorts of hues and flavors, like a sweet and shiny box of cakes.

Right now, our color lineup is like this: With her experience in the kyudo club and writing poetry in middle school, Umi's in charge of our lyrics and training regimen.

And, our other second-year, the cosplay-loving Kotori, is in charge of clothes making and cosmetics.

Then, since the first-year Hanayo and the third-year Nico have always loved idols and are so thorough in their idol knowledge, they're in charge of our dance moves and media strategy (all our media is online-only, though).

The first-year Rin, being a former track team member who's super athletic, is our training leader, and the first-year Maki, who's played the piano from a young age and is a super rich girl does composing.

Hm, when I think about it now, I should have spent my time learning something instead of playing dodgeball all day after school when I was in elementary school.

All of these normal girls have these skills, and I'm just relying on them for everything. I feel like I'm completely useless here...

So, your slightly-depressed second-year Honoka is currently in charge of making the schedule.

I feel bad because you could get just about anyone to do this job, but I'm kinda the one who started μ's, so right now I'm the temporary leader and center.

In reality, the others are a lot better at this, and it's really not my style.

But, oh well♡

Maybe when I'm the center, the others will stand out more♪

After all, Maki once said to me, "I honestly never ever thought about becoming an idol, but because you were doing it, for some reason, I thought I could do it too."

Isn't that right?♪ Your typical idea of an idol isn't a hard-to-approach beauty, like a model, but more like the sort of cute girl who's always smiling and shining, right?

So, even a normal girl like me can try to go for that effect!

Hm, yes, very good! That's what I'll be, an idol you can meet! Or rather, an idol that you can't resist rooting for, like your classmate sitting next to you, !

Oh, that's the catchphrase for μ's that Hanayo thought up.

But, Nico immediately rejected it for being "too lame!"

I liked it, though.

Of course, we're trying to be real idols that everyone knows, but if we're being honest here, I get the feeling that being the girl next to you in class suits us better.

Sometimes, in a colorful box of cakes, there's a plain pudding sitting in there, right?

And, that pudding can be surprisingly popular. Right? When Dad brings home gifts, he always gets two puddings.

My sister and I would rejoice, "Hooray, pudding! You remembered to get enough for both of us♪"

And my dad would say, "Of course I did, the pudding's cheap!"

...

However, your "classmate" Honoka, from the local manjuu shop Homura, is suffering from muscle pains right now.

Ugh, this sucks, if I sit down, I won't be able to get back up. We're trying out our dance for real tomorrow, but will I really be okay?

What if I can't dance right and someone replaces me as the center?

I don't really mind if I'm not the center, but that's more work for everyone else when we change the dance.

Everyone else has their own duties in addition to the dances. I'm already useless enough as it is, so I can't drag them down even more by letting my muscle pains keep me from dancing. Absolutely not!

Okay, I've gotta keep trying harder now!

Just a bit more and then I'll rest. Then, I'll do some extra practice for tomorrow. That way, if anyone's not sure how to do any of the moves, I can be a good center and show them how it's done.

Yeah, that's the responsibility of the center, right?

Even if I'm the temp center, I'm the type that needs to show off my best self.

'cause I'm a hard worker!

That's the one thing I've been complimented on ever since I was little. My cheerfulness and energy are the only things I've got going for me, but no matter what happens, I never give up, and I never give in.

People would tell me I'm a real hard worker.

Man, the memories, huh? I'll try my best.

I'll practice.

I'll memorize the dance perfectly. See how I'm doing now?





Here I go, watch this. One and two and three and four...

Next thing I know, I'm floating.

I'm dancing in a dream.

My aching foot feels light, as if it's grown wings, and in my dream, my dance moves are super sharp♡

My turns and skips are perfect! Wow, is everyone going to tell me I did a good job?

Hey, everyone! I'm working hard, too!

♡♡♡♡♡♡

When I wake up, my futon is thick with the scent of Salonpas.

My room is filled with the light of morn... Oh no!

When did I fall asleep?

I won't have time to tidy up the store like I always do in the morning! Hey, wait a minute.

I rush downstairs and shout, "Moooom! Why was I sleeping in my room!? I remember coming home from school yesterday, and putting on a Salonpas, but..."

To that, Yukiho, who's already eating breakfast, responds, "Oh, you're finally awake. You don't remember? Yesterday, you fell asleep right there in the living room without even finishing your castella, so I woke you up and took you to your room. You even said you didn't need dinner. You must have been really tired, huh? Your face looked the same as a sleeping baby."

Yukiho giggles. She looks kinder than yesterday.

"Is the Salonpas working? I hear when you get muscle pains, the only thing you can do is just wait it out. Sleeping was probably the right choice."

Oh, she's right! I think I'm feeling a lot better now!

"Alright, I'm all set for today's practice, then♪" I say, as my stomach rumbles loudly.

"Pfft. I haven't seen you like this in a long time. When you were younger, you'd always play until your power went out, and you fell asleep in the evening. When you woke up in the morning, you'd make a huge fuss and eat a heaping bowl of rice."

"Huh, did I do that? That's kinda embarrassing, ah, ahahaha♡"

Now that I think about it, she's right.

I vaguely remember.

As a kid, I'd get completely absorbed in my games. I'd just run around until it got dark, without even stopping to eat my snacks. I'd be hungry by the time I got home, but by then, I'd be so tired, I'd just sink into the pile of seat cushions in the living room and fall asleep.

Difference is, back then, Dad would carry me to my room.

"You're really absorbed in this school idol stuff, huh?"

"Y-Yeah, I guess so♡"

Yukiho looks at me seriously, as if she's a little bit impressed. It's kinda embarrassing. Ah, ahahaha.

Oh man, people are gonna say they can't tell which one of us is supposed to be the big sister again!

Well, anyway.

About that stain off to the side of this page...

Sorry, guys!

That's my drool. I fell asleep writing this entry...

I tried to clean it off, but there's still some left♡

Waah! I'll really, really do my best at today's practice, so please forgive me!

I'm still the center, after all♡

Today, my energy's fully charged♪

I'll dance and dance and dance and show everyone how it's done!



μ's, music start!

Comments♥Maki

A drool stain? I can't believe her! I don't understand how she can sleep like that. I can't ever fall asleep in cars or trains, much less in the middle of class, so Honoka's nerves do make me jealous... Er, no, no they don't. I'll skip sleep to practice some more next time, so we'll have a dance-off to see who's the next center!







## 04 - I Want a Club Room!

"Honoka, is your shoulder covered?"

"Yeah, I'm good... And besides, what's more important is making sure our stuff stays dry."

I'm standing underneath the aqua-blue umbrella that Umi's holding.

Walking shoulder to shoulder with Umi, I hold the sports bag in front of me, making sure it doesn't get wet, and raise it up.

Drip, drip.

Large drops of rain quietly fall en masse.

The shoulder bag is too large for me to fully wrap my arms around. I can't get a good grip on it, so it gradually slides down.

I hear its contents rustling.

"Will this really work? We can't let the clothes and pompoms and stuff get wet..." I say, concerned.

"Should we run?" Umi asks.

"Okay," I say, and we start running.

Just a bit farther and we'll reach the front entrance to my house, the manjuu shop Homura.

"Pant pant... phew, seems like we made it," Umi says once we get under the eaves of the roof.

"Yeah. Thanks, Umi. Next time, if it looks like it'll rain, I'll make sure to bring an umbrella!" I say apologetically, and Umi stifles a giggle.

"None of us expect you to plan anything out that far in advance. You'd probably just bring it on a day when it doesn't rain, and then leave it behind and lose it anyway. Besides, you don't even check the weather report, do you?"

Oof... She's got a point.

Before I can think of a response, Umi says, "Your specialty is having enough power to carry this huge bag all by yourself. Just use that to support us, and we're good," and then coolly withdraws to her home.

Uh, that's not much of a compliment, Umi.

"I'm home."

I enter the house and let out a sigh. Once I'm in my room, I examine myself.

Dang, my uniform's pretty wet. Hurriedly rubbing a towel across my uniform blazer and wet, clumped hair, I quickly take off my uniform, which is darkened with water only on the right side, and throw it on a hanger.

And then, oh no, I gotta make sure the bag is... phew!

The outfits, shiny braided cords for the stage decorations, pom-poms, and all the other stuff are all dry!

That's all because of me! Uh huh. See, Umi, I've got something going for me other than my beastly strength!

But, maybe I should still dry them out? They're not wet, but they do feel a little moist, and I don't want them to smell weird after they dry out, I think as I spread out the contents of the bag.

"Man, there's so much stuff in here!" I can't resist saying as my room starts disappearing under the outfits and concert accessories. "Seriously, how come we have to bring this stuff





to and from the school all the time!? I wish we had a club room!!!"

♡♡♡♡♡

And so, I'm writing my activity diary in my room.

But, our activities only lasted for like 30 minutes today, so there's not much to write about.

Today, our plan was to prepare for the concert we have planned for right before summer vacation, do a costume check, and discuss ideas for the stage effects, but the moment we had all our gear laid out, rain started falling on our meeting, and everything went up in smoke.

"Eek, hurry! Put away the stuff before it gets wet!"

"Oh no, there's no space to put this!"

When I asked Umi, who had brought a folding umbrella, she told me that the weather report said there would be some rain in the afternoon, but I was too busy eating breakfast and tidying the store in the morning, so I had no idea.

I was surprised to see those large drops of rain suddenly start falling out of the sky.

It's true that the sky had been gray around the time when break period ended, and the chilly wind made it feel like the beginnings of a storm, but I didn't think it would actually rain.

In fact, I never even considered such a thing.

After all, this was the long-awaited day when we were going to decide on the setup of our concert.

Kotori brought the costumes, Rin and Hanayo brought the decorations for the stage, Umi brought wired speakers to play our music on, you know the deal. Over the course of our club activities, we'd split up the work of bringing in equipment.

Before we knew it, we'd built up a huge load of stuff, but today, we'd finally got all the equipment together, and finished our constant dance practice. I'd been excited all morning since this was the big day when we were finally going to be able to rehearse for the actual concert, but that was all for nothing, because of the rain.

I mean, our current club space is the edge of the roof, the most exposed part of the campus. If it rains, we have to cancel our activities, and without permission, we can't use the classrooms either (A while back, Rin said it'd be okay, so we unofficially borrowed an empty club room, but the teacher was pretty mad when she caught us, ehehe).

Yep.

As it is right now, μ's is a grassroots idol group, so we don't have a set meeting location or day, and we don't have any budget or supervisor either.

Waaaah, I wish we could at least have a place to put our stuff!

Phew, I wrote it out♪

Screams from the heart. So, now I'm consulting.

Hey, guys, what should we do to get a club room?

I'm using this diary to ask for your opinions!

What I think is, first, we need to make μ's an official club!

But, I feel like the hurdle's pretty high for that. The next thing is to get a teacher to be our supervisor!

Pretty good idea, don't you think?

If we had a supervising teacher, it'd be easier to ask for permission to use a classroom, too, and we might be able to use the teacher's place to store our stuff♡

Right? Am I right? Good idea, right? Does anyone have a teacher they can ask?

By the way, the science or music prep rooms seem like good places to store our stuff, so I think we should go after a science or music teacher....



Maybe not Nakajima, the music teacher, though. They're already the supervisor for the music club, so they wouldn't have time, right? And then Honjou, the science teacher, kinda scares me, so I've never talked to them much. Anyone on good terms with them? I just burned an alcohol lamp black in our last lab, so, it might be hard for me to go... Ehehehe, sorry I can't be of more help♥

Waaah, in that case, maybe we really just have to think about gathering more members, and becoming an official club, huh? The hurdle's high for that too, but either way, we still need to shine as a group, so when people see us, they think, I wanna join too!

If we couldn't do that, then you couldn't call us idols!

And, we'd never ever be able to show the world how wonderful  $\mu$ 's and our activities are, and get more students to come.

Okay, there we have it! Starting tomorrow, I'm going to catch us even more new members so we can get a club room!

And, for that, we'll need to shine brighter and become amazing idols for people to aspire to, so I'll practice even harder!

Jeez, still...

While I was writing this entry, the rain outside just kept getting louder.

We might not be able to practice tomorrow, either.

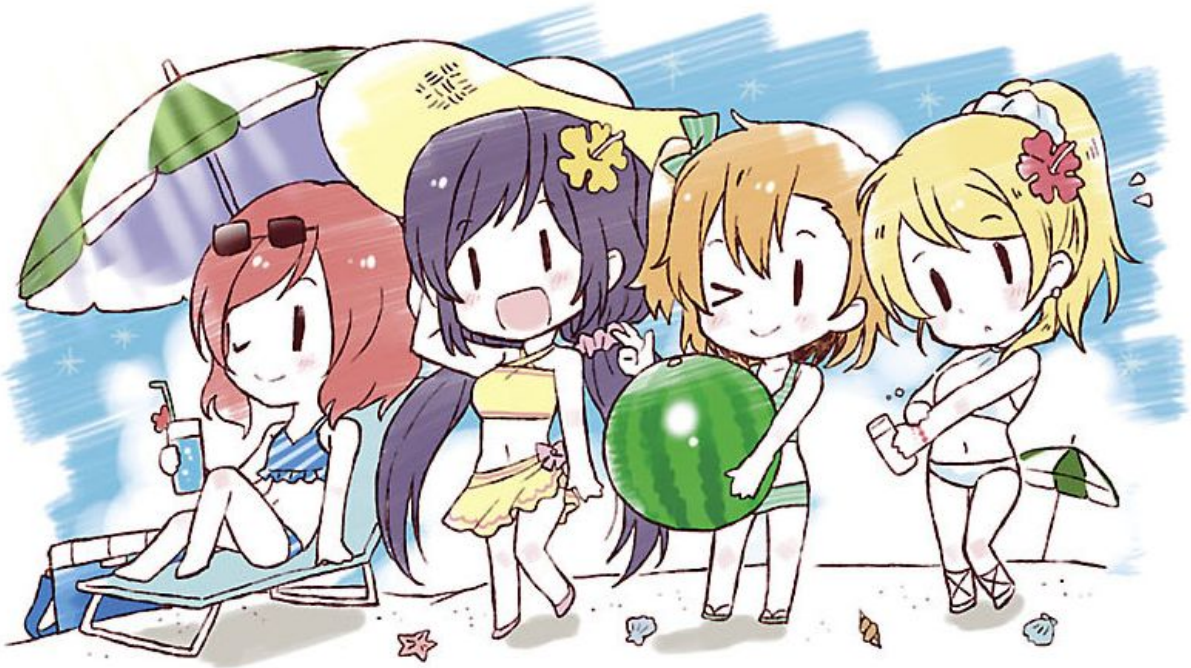
Waaah, I really wish we had a club room!

Comments♥Umi

"Hardship builds character. If you encounter hardship, then endure it, and travel onward along your path, enjoying your path more for it." If overcoming troubles is what allows one to grow, then I shall trust that this rain will allow us to grow one step further. Like a stalk of wheat rising after it is tread upon, I know that Honoka will bring us strong, bright, and radiant days to come.



## 05 - Our First Event's So Much Trouble!?



Tomorrow is our first school event.

Oh, to be honest, when I say "first", I don't mean like it's our ACTUAL first.

Well, ever since the formation of  $\mu$ 's in April, we've been doing a lot of club activities, but now we have the third years Eli and Nozomi with us, and soon we'll have our first school event with all nine members of  $\mu$ 's. And, actually, we were invited to do it.

Ehehe, oh man, I'm so happy, my face is burning up!

Whenever I think back to our first concert, even now, it gets my heart pumping so fast, even though it was a tragic concert without any audience.

But, we've grown quite a bit since then. Now we've got nine members, and we've got quite a few more original songs, too.

Yep, just goes to show that as long as you keep on trying and never give up, then your dreams will come true, huh? And now, at last, the student council's asked us to perform at an event! Mmhmm!

Oh, but still, the request is coming from the student council, and the president is one of our members, so we're basically inviting ourselves in, though.

Anyway, during Golden Week, when my grandma said she wanted me to run the Children's Day event for the neighborhood association out in front of the Homura (where we sell kashiwa mochi and chimaki), that was a lot more...

actually, it's not all that similar, is it?

When my grandma said that with a smile while I was happily eating snacks at home with Umi, we were so surprised we nearly choked on red bean paste, though! Ehehe~

So, I'm super duper excited for today!



I hope we can make this event a huge success, and get invited to do lots more. We'll get more concert videos to upload, and more people will know about us. All of μ's will get more fired up, too! So, even though we're just taking advantage of her "connections" (as Makkii puts it), we're thankful to Eli for giving us this chance! We may have debuted as school idols, but we're still green. We have to take every chance for exposure that we can get! Man, I knew getting the student council president to join us was a good idea! Having privilege is great♪ Just kidding, ehehe☆

Uh, so anyway, we're doing the prep work for tomorrow's event today.

And that big event is... the pool opening!

Gosh, it's such an idol thing to do, don't you think?

Normally, the student council organizes a volunteer group to open the pool after school, so we don't have any guests from off-campus, and not even many of the students come either...

Of course, it's a far cry from the culture festival or the sports festival or any of those big events.

But, we'll still get to show ourselves off to the people at school a little bit, and I think getting the first rights to film a video in front of the pool will let us get a head start on summer♡

I also go to the amusement park's pool over summer break sometimes, but on weekends, there's often some sentai hero or idol show there.

Idols dancing in swimsuits on a special stage by the poolside while blasting music!

And I watch this classic part of a happy summer's scenery while eating shaved ice.

Yep. That's why some of us actually wanted to wear swimsuits for this event. And by "some of us," I mostly mean Nico♪

But, there were a few problems with that, like would it be okay to wear swimsuits at school? Would the student council get mad at us? And Umi solidly refused to wear a swimsuit.

In the end, Kotori said the event date was set too soon, and she couldn't make matching swimsuits for all of us in time, so that idea was out.

It's a shame, but that's just the way it is.

We can do swimsuits next time.

I mean, it's not like I wouldn't be embarrassed at all to wear a swimsuit, but still.

I'm an idol♪

When it's summer, you just gotta try out a pure white swimsuit, don't you think?

I just hope I'll get to do that once summer vacation starts for real♡

But, yeah.

Before I knew it, it's already June. Flip the calendar one more time, and summer vacation's in sight.

Where has all that time gone? It sure flies by, huh? Oops, am I acting like Grandma again? Crap, Umi's gonna get mad at me again for not acting idol-like enough! That didn't happen! Not at all! I lost my eraser so I can't erase it, though. (I've been borrowing Kotori's at school, ahahah.) Just pretend you didn't see anything here, okay? ♡

So anyway, uh, our pool at Otonokizaka Academy is, of course, an outdoor pool open to the public.

I looove swimming! I went to swimming school when I was little, so I'm pretty good at it♪

An indoor pool is nice and handy because you can use it anytime, but the real fun of a pool is to play with your friends and splash cool water around under the burning sun and the clear, enveloping sky of summer, and that shining moment when you dive in and hit the water hard! You get me?



It's kinda funny how we all wear those childish school swimsuits, too.  
That's how this beloved, long-awaited season of mine begins!

Apparently, every year, around this time in June, Otonoki conducts a pool opening just before swim classes start. Up until now, the student council managed it as a volunteer event, but to be honest, I never knew what it is exactly that they did... This is my first time participating.

Turns out they conduct prayers for safety during the swimming season, let people in to enjoy the pool for the first time, play bingo, and other fun little things at that.

I feel a bit sorry that I never knew about this until the school was about to shut down.

I think if people didn't care so little about our school, we wouldn't be in danger of shutting down in the first place, so we should do our best for this event, and show everyone one more great thing about Otonoki.

It's kind of a dream that people would actually come to the pool opening to see us. Or rather, we need to really become a group that can draw crowds like that.

I'll do my best!

And so, I came to the pool.



Woah, what the heck!?

The splashing water, glimmering brilliantly in the summer sun, is nowhere to be seen.

Instead, there's a large, gridded space containing goopy green liquid. It looks like a massive laboratory tank.

I could easily imagine frogs living in there.

"E-Eli, what is this? Our pool turned into a swamp!"

I find Eli standing in a wide-legged stance by the diving boards.

"Oh, you're here. We're draining the pool right now. Be careful not to fall in, okay?"

The roar of rushing water emanates from beneath Eli's feet. The drain must be under there. Eugh, it'd be terrible if I got flushed down there! I'm clumsy, so I'll have to be super careful!

"Sorry for coming early. I guess I got too excited, huh? I didn't realize you guys were still cleaning up. I'll come back after-" I start...

"Did we keep you waitin- Woah, what the!?! Is this a pond!?"

"It almost looks like a fishing hole☆"

"Ooh, maybe there's carp in there♡"

In come the three first-years, Maki, Rin, and Hanayo, respectively.

Of course, they're also surprised by the state of the pool.

I didn't know this either, but the pool is filled with water and left undisturbed over the winter, and soon enough, there's so much moss and algae growing in there that you can't even see the bottom.

I'll admit, it definitely looks like fish could live in there...

Looking at her watch, Eli says, "Well, no, you didn't come too early at all. In fact, we don't have much time left, so we're not even gonna make it in time if we don't start soon. Where are the other thr-"

"Sorry, it was my turn to clean the classroom today..."

"I was on cleaning duty too."

Umi and Kotori arrive, panting heavily after running over here.

They're wearing apologetic expressions on their reddened faces.



Aw, it's nothing to worry about. They're taking this too seriously. Still, I guess they're just that excited for the event, too.

And, coming from behind them I hear, "Nico nii, nico nii, nico nico nii♪ The fairy of the pool, Nico-nii, makes her debut! Hey, everyone! Were you all waiting for me?"

Nico's voice is brighter than the summer sun. She skips in, and... Oh, she's already in costume! Huh, did we have a rehearsal scheduled for today?

As Nico strikes a pose, Eli grabs her by the arms, and straightens her posture, making her stand at attention.

"Yeah, I was wondering how long you were going to make us wait, Miss Fairy. Now, first things first, get rid of that costume. Can you get this place ready soon?"

Hm? Hmmmmmm?

As Eli turns to face us with a slightly stern expression, question marks float over all our heads.

At the same time, the door of the pool shack swings open.

"Oh hey, Nozomi."

Coming out, Nozomi says, "Now all our members are present, eh♡ Now, let's get you guys to work!"

In her hands, she's carrying a long wooden stick, ending with a head of green plastic hairs. A deck brush.

"Whaaaaa!?" we all cry out. Umi sighs.

Wait a minute, we were supposed to clean the pool for tomorrow's event!?

♡♡♡♡♡

Scrub scrub scrub scrub.



"It's pretty fast when we all work together, huh♡" Nozomi says as she wipes her brow. Meanwhile, the rest of us, having changed to our tracksuits, are furiously working our deck brushes.

"Sorry about this. It seems like we couldn't get the budget to hire cleaners, and when we tried to get the students to volunteer, nobody signed up either. So, since μ's is having an event here, I figured we might as well," Eli says with a nervous smile as she gathers up the ball moss.

"Yeah, right! You planned this all along! I tried to warn the everyone about Elichka and her demonic ways so many times, but-"

Rin pushes down on Nico's upturned brush and urges her to calm down.

"Hey, it's fine, someone's gotta do it anyway☆ I'm having fun, at least. Not like you get a chance to do this every day, right? Here, watch me skate on my mop across the smooth pool flo-"

"Rin, watch out!"

Rin runs, slips, and falls before Hanayo can stop her. Hitting the ground with a loud thud, she continues to slide all the way to the other end of the pool.

"Tehehe... and Rin gets first place, sliding into the goal at blazing speed!"

"Gah, fine, it doesn't even matter where the mess is anymore! You can just slide around and clean it with your body, then!"

When Maki's around Rin and Hanayo, it's a bit like she's their mom.

"Pfft"

The thought makes me laugh a little.

"What's so funny, Honoka?" Maki asks, pouting a little.

"Sorry, I'm not laughing at you guys, okay?"

Not at all.

It's just that watching us clean up like this has really made me feel like we're bottom-rung idols, hehe.

With that in mind, I look up to the sky.

I think this is fine too, though. Yeah.

My hot sweat runs in a trail from behind my ear and down my throat.

The vast blue sky is above us, and summer is near.

Tomorrow, we'll be singing at this pool's side.

I don't know how many people are going to come see us, but I wanna brush this pool as thanks for them.

Because this will be an important venue for  $\mu$ 's. This is where we'll take one more important step.

That's right. We should be thankful just for being allowed to sing here.

And, to our school, to our Otonoki, I'm sorry. I never knew the pool needed to be cleaned like this.

Somebody had to have been doing it this entire time, so that we could swim in the pool.

As I watch the student council president Eli far away, brushing with all her might at the front of the group, I think, being the student council president isn't just about the privileges, but also about working your hardest to help the school, huh?

Alright, I'll do my best, too!

I can't do the things Eli can, but I'll do my best for tomorrow's event in my own way!

And, for that...

Today, I have to scrub the pool floor!!

I look across the pool floor, its blue paint about halfway uncovered at last. I feel a bit overwhelmed, but never giving up is my policy! From here on out, I'll power up and work even harder!

Waaah, what will happen to tomorrow's concert if we don't finish today, though?

Worrying and rubbing the bottom of my nose, the green moss smears onto my face, making a green moustache.

Nico took a picture of it, so maybe we could show it to everyone tomorrow?

If you wanna see it, then definitely come to tomorrow's pool opening concert!

I should use that to advertise.

Ah, I hope tomorrow's a bright, sunny day. We can stand beneath the shining skies, at the shining pool that we cleaned ourselves, and have our first shining concert as a group of nine.

Oh no, that thought's getting me so excited, I might not be able to sleep! But then I yawn.

"Ahhhhhhh..."

Physical labor sure does take its toll, huh!? I'll do my best again tomorrow!

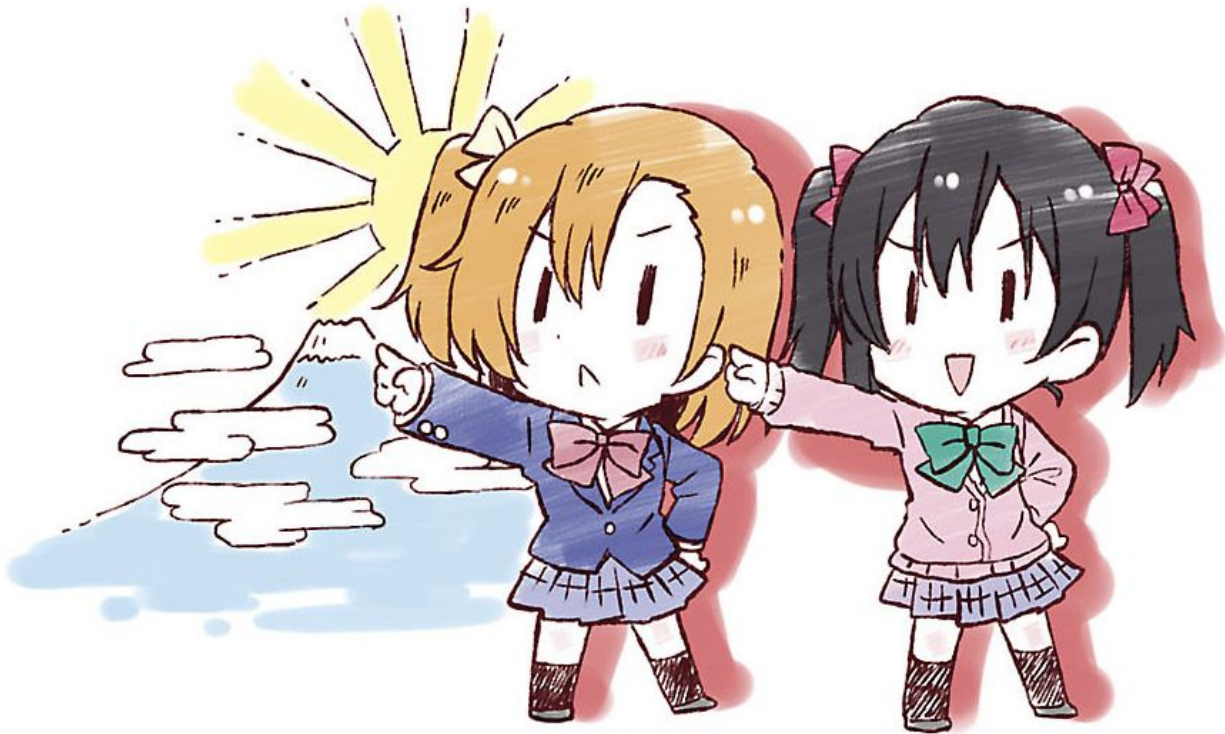
Honoka, signing off♡

Comments♡Eli

Hey everyone, thanks for helping out with the student council's event. I wasn't trying to trick you guys about the pool cleaning, though... I'm grateful that you're all such good girls, hehe♡ The members of  $\mu$ 's are all so cute, kind and hard-working. I'm sure you'll be great wives some day♪ From, Elichka



## 06 - Idol Photoshoot!



"Nobody's coming, huh...?"

"... Nobody..."

I'm sitting next to Kotori, at a desk with a paper sign reading "Sign-ups".

As we talk, I stare across the table at the empty space where a line is supposed to be.

It's a bright June afternoon. The trees sway, coated with fresh greenery.

"Maybe we picked a bad spot, huh?"

"Maybe we did..."

We're behind the gym.

There's a big tree, a pretty flowerbed, and a wonderful view of the city from this school, situated at the peak of Otonokizaka. I chose this spot because I thought it'd be a good place to hold a photoshoot...

Drip.

Oh, something cold landed on the top of my head.

"Oh, it's raining, huh?"

"Yeah, it's raining..."

While Kotori sits next to me and repeats the things I say, I look up to the sky. There was a soft light filling the clouded sky earlier... drip drip

When I see the rain falling from the bright cloud cover, my mouth nearly falls open.



"Aw, should we just call it a day?"

Disappointed, I look down at the opened notebook we set on the desk. Yep, it's still blank.

That's to be expected, I guess... We've been waiting here as soon as school ended, but in the end, not even one visitor showed up.

On the notebook, the text of the example entry I wrote beforehand dances in vain.

### Example Sign-Up


Photoshoot partner: Honoka Kousaka

Photoshoot situation: Beneath the dogwood

Costume (circle one!): School/Stage/Casual/Cheer/Track

Write your name, please: Manabi Otonoki

Would you like to get info on our future concerts? Yes/No

(If yes, please write your  address!)

"We might get wet out here. Should we move?"

Kotori's voice brings me back to my senses, and the two of us move the clattering desk under the pilotis at the gym entrance.

Still, Kotori said it was still long before sundown, and the rain might stop soon, so we decided to wait a bit longer.

Despite that...

"Nobody's coming, huh?"

"Nope, nobody's coming..."

We really do have a long way to go.

Is this what a school idol's photoshoot is like?

♡♡♡♡♡

Any proper idol should have photoshoots!

So said Nico at the start of the daily break session during our daily rehearsal.

"A photoshoot? What's that? Like we all take pictures together? The only camera I have is the one in my cellphone, though..." I reply, and Nico tilts her head.



"Oh, you never disappoint me, Honoka! You don't even know what a photoshoot is, you cute little thing♡"  
she says while grinding her knuckles against my head.

Waaah, my ignorance is being exposed again!

So, what is a photoshoot anyway? Some sort of industry term?

According to what Nico later explained about these "idol photoshoots", we're not the ones taking any pictures at photoshoots. Instead, fans gather at a studio, and shoot photos of us, apparently.

I see. So, in that case, it doesn't matter if I don't have a camera of my own.

There's more to idols than just singing and holding concerts, huh?

According to Nico, the idols out there rent out studios and have these events pretty often.

She's not the number 1 idol researcher for nothing! Nico really knows her stuff!

But, we're school idols. Or rather, we've still got a long, long, long, long x100 way to go before we can become school idols, so how are we supposed to rent a studio for our photoshoot!?

I don't even know where to find one of these studios.

I can't imagine how we're supposed to hold a photoshoot.

What to do?

So, you know what Nico said?

We've still got a long, long, long, long way to go as idols, in terms of singing, dancing, popularity, and name recognition! Basically, we've got so very, very, very much to work on...

I don't think it's necessary to say "long" or "very" that many times...

Anyway, in Nico-Nii's words,

"Now that Makkii's part of the club, we've managed to start making progress on our original songs, and we've been working hard on our dances and having the entire team share ideas, and to be blunt, we're lucky enough that all of us were already surprisingly athletic, so I think we've got pretty good dance skills for a slapped-together school idol group! So, the only thing we need now is a strategy to get more exposure and increase our popularity. In particular, we really, really need to brush up on our photogenics!"

... Apparently.

"Photogenics? Is that some sort of delicious new food?" Rin asks with her finger to her mouth.

Nico swishes her finger in Rin's direction to interrupt.

"You there! You don't even know what photogenic means? People like you are the reason why the world is filled with girls who only ever flash the peace sign when they're getting their photos taken!"

Twitch.

I... Is she talking about me? Ah... ahahaha...♡

"The word 'photogenic' means how pretty you look when you get your picture taken. You know the type, right? The kind of girl who's nothing special in person, but she's super pretty in pictures, or like they're too good at selfies, their profile pic looks nothing like themselves, or so on..."

Mm hmm... Everyone focuses their gaze on Nico.

"H-Hey, c'mon, what are you guys looking at? I know I'm super smart and cute, but it's embarrassing when you guys stare!"

I don't think that's what we meant... Oh well♡

"You've got a point. We still get nervous when we're getting our photos taken, huh? I still do the peace sign on reflex, and I thought about it after you mentioned it one day, but I'm still not so sure whether my face looks better from the left or the right."

Apparently, much like how people have a dominant hand and a dominant eye, people have a dominant side of their face. I'd never heard that before in my life. It was a real shocker!

"Oh, it's not just the face, you know? If you want to be an idol, knowledge of gravure techniques is a must-have. You've seen them too, right? There are those idol magazines that are just full of those cute idols that you love so much, with their with blushing red cheeks."



Ohh, she means the ones with swimsuit gravure photos.

"They're not just using their swimsuits to push up their breasts. All of them put in all sorts of work. They need to make sure their hair flows in the wind, the curtains wrap around them just right, and they open their mouths just right so it looks a little bit naughty..."

Oh, Nico's coming up to me with her mouth half-open! Eek, this feels so naughty♡♡

"See, idols have to be able to do all sorts of expressions and poses at any time! If you always act like you're taking pictures on a field trip, then there won't be any future left for μ's!" Nico says while dropping her hips into a rocking air guitar pose.

I see. So, we need to practice so we can do poses like that at a moment's notice!

And so, we looked back and reflected on our past mistakes.

When someone tells us they're going to take a picture, we still reflexively make the peace sign, and we're so nervous, our faces look stiff even when we're told to look natural.

Plus, all this stuff about posing, we never even thought about that until now.

Alright, in that case...!

"Hey hey, do you think we could, like, have a school idol version of this photoshoot stuff you're talking about, or something?"

Nico's eyes sparkle as soon as she hears me, while Kotori and Umi sigh and look skywards.

But, if there's something that interests us, then just do it! That's our style, isn't it?



♡♡♡♡♡♡♡♡

"Still... maybe we should have known better than to have a photoshoot on a regular weekday afternoon..."

"Yeah, after handing out all those flyers..."

Together with Kotori, I'm managing the front desk, sopping wet. Gazing blankly at the raindrops falling from the sky, we sit idly, waiting for the thirty minutes until closing time to pass.

"Yoohoo! Is the photoshoot over already?"

I hear an energetic voice in the distance.

Kotori's face lights up with joy and then... freezes.

"Welcome! Our first guest for the day is... Rin!? And Hanayo, too!?"

"We were wondering how you were doing, so we decided to drop by!" Rin says. "So, team, how's business? Did you get a lot of guests? Did you take tons of cute pictures? I can't wait until it's my turn!"

Kotori gives the two of them a strained smile.

"Nada. Maybe we were too hasty? The two of us have been on standby the entire time," I tell her.

"We were just discussing whether we should just close up shop for the day-" Kotori starts.

"Really? That's too bad! But it's okay now! I figured this might happen, so I brought this!" Rin says, bringing out a large single-lens reflex camera.

"Wow, that looks professional! How did you get that!?"

"It's one of my dad's old things☆ A photoshoot isn't gonna heat up without anyone shooting the photos, after all. I don't mean to astroturf it, but I figured I'd join in on the shooting action if you didn't have enough guests."

"Me too. Posing and stuff is a bit too embarrassing for me, but I think I can take pictures just fine. As an idol lover, I think I have an easier time relating to the cameraman..." Hanayo says shyly.

Then, from behind her... Nico pops her head out!

"And don't forget, I'm here to whip you into shape. At least until we get guests, anyway. Otherwise, you'll just be standing around and doing nothing until then, right? Let me teach you the basics of posing! So... Right, let's get you two changed into cheer uniforms, first!"

"Huh? I'd rather wear a tracksuit than a cheer uniform♪ Going for that casualwear idol look, you know!" Rin pouts.

"Um, I'd think we should play it safe and wear stage costumes instead. I think our fans would definitely be excited to see idols in costume up close..." says Hanayo.

"Really? I think everyone's already used to seeing Kotori and Honoka in costume already. Really, the cheer outfit would be..." says Nico.

The three of them immediately get into a lively conversation.

"Sheesh, the two of us are supposed to be the cameramen today, so it doesn't matter how people are used to seeing us! Right, so how about we all just dress up and take turns photographing each other?" says Rin.

As if waiting for her to say that, Nico goes, "Ooh, that might be nice! I'll put on the cheer costume♡ I gotta say, I really do shine my brightest when I'm having my picture taken, not the other way around♡"

"And I'll be the dedicated cameraman, like I was planning," says Hanayo.

"And you guys can take pictures of me taking pictures in my tracksuit!"

Uh, what do you mean "you guys?" I think, looking behind Rin.

"Hey, I'm not too late, am I? I brought my sweet camera and everything♪" says Maki.

"And with my Cheki, I can get signed photos right on the spot♡" says Nozomi.

Maki and Nozomi are surprisingly pumped-up about this, and coming with them are Umi and Eli, both looking somewhat exasperated!

The rain had already let up before we realized it.

Looks like Kotori was right. It was just a passing shower.

Afterwards, we had a huge μ's-only photoshoot, with no guests♡

Nozomi had brought extra costumes: miko uniforms, swimsuits, maid costumes, and volleyball uniforms. I'm not sure exactly what she was going for, but the cosplay-loving Kotori got so excited, and everyone had a good time, so whatever.

We even got personal posing lessons from Nico herself.



There's nothing wrong with taking a day off from dance rehearsals to relax like this every once in a while, right? Oh, but don't worry, Nico's uploading all of the photos we took to the internet, so this too is a part of our activities as μ's!

I hope a lot of people check them out. Let's have a contest to see whose photos get the most views!

Please give me your support, everyone ♡♡

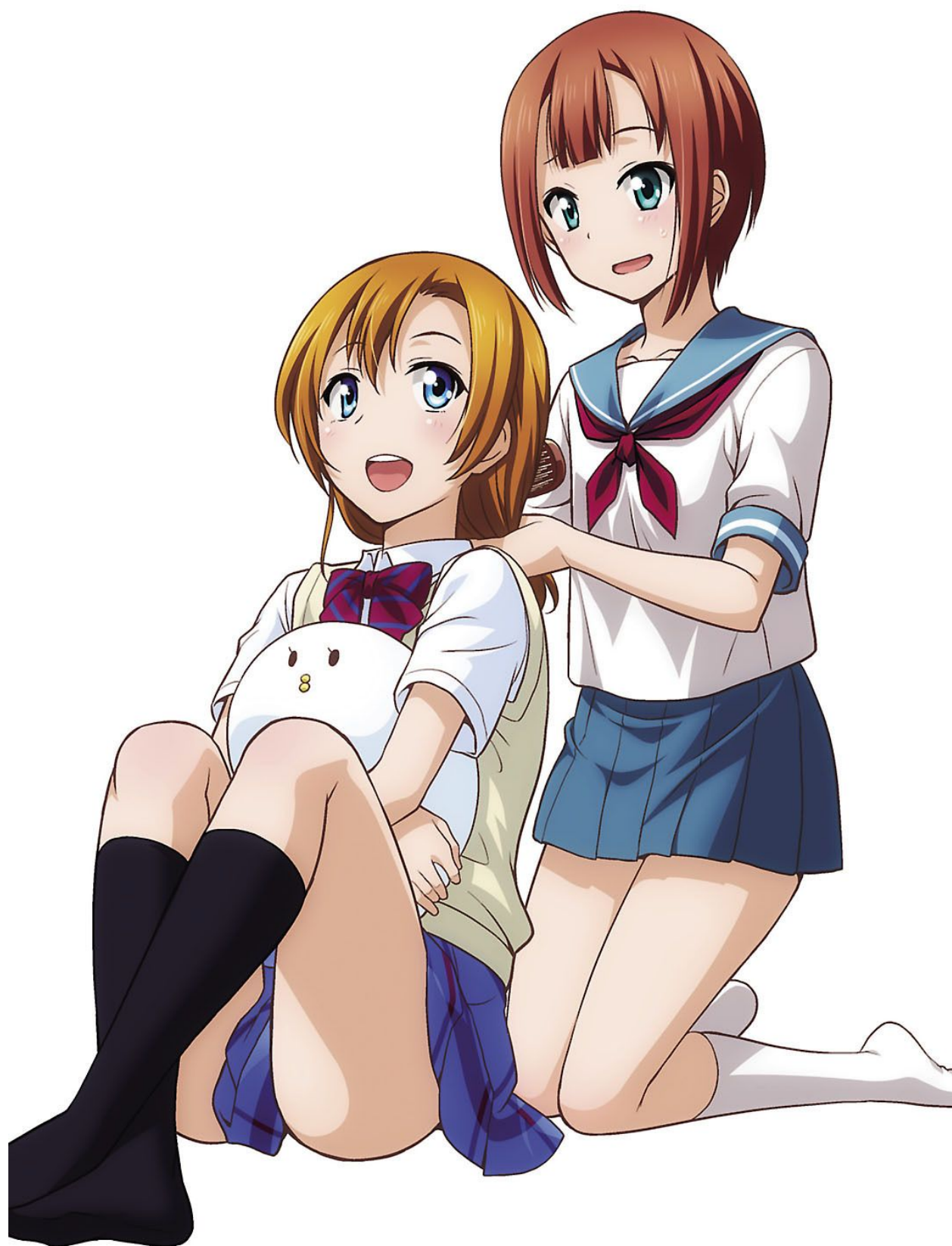
Honoka out♪

Comments♡Nico

It's great that we got so much practice with photos today♡ The members of μ's have a long way to go in terms of photogenics, but they've already got good



material to work with, so with a bit of effort, they'll grow well♪ So says Nico, the master. Let's have a swimsuit gravure photoshoot next time! With my research backing up my poses, I won't lose to Nozomi!



## 07 - Me and Yukkii's Future

"I'm home!"

Phew, there was so much practice today! I'm pooped!

Even though the days are longer with summer drawing nearer, it's still exhausting when practice keeps going until this late. I yank on the shop's sliding door with all my might. Clatter clatter clatter!

Oh crap, that was loud.

Mom's gonna yell at me again.

"S-Sorry, I pulled a bit too hard! Welc-"

I poke my head in and look at the counter. Huh?

Nobody's there.

No customers, of course. But, normally, I'd see either Mom or my little sister Yukiho behind the counter.

So, why aren't either of them there?

I check the clock. It's 6:23 PM.

Sheesh, that's dangerous. There's still more than 30 minutes until closing time.

"Don't blame me if a thief comes in and steals any of the few leftover manju, okay?" I mutter, helping myself to one of the salted daifuku at the edge of the counter♡

Chomp.

Mmm, that salt and sugar is just what my tired body needs!

Ah, I'm so hungry. Hm, what are we having for dinner tonight?♪

Singing in my mind, I pass through the gap in the counter, over the dark threshold in the back of the shop, and up the small staircase to the second floor. Past this point is the Kousaka family's private quarters.

Normally, I'm not supposed to pass through the shop like this. Instead, I'm supposed to turn the corner in front of the store and use the private entrance in the back. But, it's too much extra effort go around to the private entrance when the shop entrance is right there, so a lot of the time, I just go through the shop instead.

Also, the area next to the private entrance is the shop's work area, and the stacks of azuki beans, sugar, and mochi flour usually make the dirt-floored room almost impassable.

Honestly, even though Mom and Dad are always telling me and Yukkii to keep our rooms clean, the work area is always filled with so much stuff, some of it even overflows into the hallway of our home.

Still...

When I complain to Grandma, she just says, "That's just the way it is for the kids in a shop-owning family. All of that stuff is what keeps us fed."

Well, my family's run a manjuu shop since before I was born.

When I was little (and even now, actually♡), I was raised being told that I was the poster girl of the Homura, as if that were just a matter of fact. When I was in preschool, I just had to lisp, "Welcome!" as I passed through the shop, and everyone would praise me for it. The old ladies living in the neighborhood would dote on me and tell me I

was so cute, they could just gobble me up.

Of course, I enjoyed it.

My little sister Yukiho and I would play pretend as manjuu shopkeepers a lot, and for a long time, I've felt a strong attachment to being a manjuu shop girl.

But

Still...





Times like today always get me thinking.

♡♡♡♡♡

Afternoon today, back when I was at school...

Fifth and sixth period were my elective classes, art and calligraphy. In art class, we were continuing work on the still lifes we started last time, and in calligraphy, we were still carving our seals, as we've been doing for a while. We still have a while before the due date for either of them, so I had a very relaxed, carefree, and peaceful afternoon today.

Maybe that was why?

It seemed the teacher wanted to get things done too, and called me in for counseling during class time. That was the individual counselling on my future that they were doing after announcing the closure of Otonokizaka Academy.

Ugh, just writing it out makes me sigh. Phew.

Remember, in April, we suddenly had the announcement that the school was closing down, right?

Even though they insist that the school will stay open until all the current students graduate, it seems that there's been quite a few families worried about their futures ever since. (It's only natural. Many of the first years said they want to transfer before the school closes.)

So, the school decided to hold individual counselling sessions to understand what each of us wanted to do.

In these meetings, they ask what we want to do in the future. Whether we'll be staying in this school until the end, or not. If not, then whether we need a letter of recommendation or we want a test-exempt transfer to another school. If we are, then what we're planning to do from here on out. That kinda stuff.

As for myself...

Of course, I'm staying at Otonokizaka Academy until the end.

Or rather, I'm going to keep doing my best in my idol activities with μ's, and I won't let Otonoki get shut down!

So, I figured that this counseling didn't matter to me.

Still, when my turn came up, and I sat down in front of my teacher, She said to me...

"Miss Kousaka, do you intend on staying at Otonoki?"

The teacher had called me to the counseling room.

"Yes! I'm going to be staying here until the very end! Actually, me and my friends are going to be spending the next two years making sure this school doesn't get shut down at all!"

"Oh, right, you're the third in your generation to attend Otonoki, right?"

The teacher smiled wryly while looking over the papers in her hands.

"Homura-brand manjuu are so good! We share them in the staff room sometimes, you know."

"Oh, thanks for your business♪ Even the teachers are enjoying them? That's great to hear."

"And you're also the third generation to be running the shop? No, actually, your shop seems much older than that. Hm, According to your family information, you have a little sister, right? In her third year of middle school. A pair of sisters, huh? Would that mean one of you will be having their husband marry into the family to continue the business?" H-Husband!? I started feeling a bit queasy in my chest.



"Hm, sorry I can't be of any more help, but I haven't heard of any of our students going to a confectioner's school. Do we have any schools specializing in Japanese confections around here? Or would your husband handle that, while you focus on management? In that case, you'd probably want to go to a vocational school or a four-year college, rather than a specialty school. Have your parents let you know their thoughts on the matter? Or do you have something completely different in mind? I heard you started some new club recently..."

Uh, uh, uh, uh, what are you talking about?

I haven't really...

This unexpected turn of events had me shocked stiff.

Gape.

Maybe the teacher finally understood when she saw my wide-open mouth.

"Right, well, the actual post-grad counseling was supposed to happen in the fall, right? Perhaps we can just set this aside until then. I can mark you down for remaining, then?"

"Y-Yes," I reply in a panicked voice. The teacher stares back at me.

"Still, fall is going to be here in the blink of an eye, Miss Kousaka. I like how cheerful and carefree you are, but you're already a second-year. If you're not planning on going to college, I think it's about time you start thinking about your future."

But...

"Already a second-year"? More like I'm only a second year! I'm currently enjoying the golden years of my youth☆ with μ's, so I thought my future was still a long way away...

♡♡♡♡♡

"I'm back! Is anyone home? Mom? Yukkii?"

I shout again into the living room, and enter the private section.

Dang, the place really is empty.

Are they running a delivery?

I start walking towards my room while loosening my uniform's ribbon, when my eyes come across an envelope on the living room table.

A large, unfamiliar light-blue envelope.

On the front, I can see it's addressed to "Otonokizaka Middle School, Year 3, Class A, Yukiho Kousaka".

At the bottom of the envelope, the name of the sender is neatly printed with their logo: Akihabara UTX Private Academy.

Next to that is a sheet of paper stamped with large red lettering, "New student information enclosed"

Kyaaaaaaaa!

W... W-w-w-w-Why!?

W-w-w-why is Yukki-!?

Why is Yukkii becoming a UTX student!?

"Mom! Mom! Mooooom!"

Before I know it, I'm shouting at the top of my lungs as I run through the house.

"Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god, It's Yukkii! She's-!"

After running a lap around the house, nobody was there, so I ended up walking circles back in the living room...

"Why? I haven't heard anything about Yukiho going to UTX... And anyway, what now? We've always been together until now. I can't believe Yukkii was thinking of this..."



As I'm going around the living room table some more, I hit my foot on the table. Ouch!  
My foot makes a dull thud on contact and I fall over... Owwwwwww...  
"Ugh, my foot... How did it come to this...?"  
I feel like I'm about to cry a little, and then...

"Oh come on, how come you have to be so noisy every time you come back? I don't even have to look. I know it's you the moment you come in. You're already in your second year of high school, aren't you? Why don't you like... settle down a bit? You might be more popular that way, like Umi from the Sonoda Dojo," said Yukiho.

She entered the room in her roomwear and wiping her head with a large bath towel.

"Yuki..."

She's here. She hasn't gone off to UTX just yet.

Even I can't believe I was so worked up over it.

Without any time to recollect myself, I try frantically to keep a single tear from coming out of my eyes, but to no avail.

I frantically wipe it off with a finger so at least Yukiho doesn't notice the tear running down my cheek.

"O-Oh, you were just in the bathroom? I was so surprised when I came back to an empty house."

"What, did you think we were all whisked off to Wonderland or something? You really haven't changed since kindergarten, have you? You're still a needy little kid who can't stand being alone!"

With a look that says, "Don't cry over this!" Yuki lets me have a corner of her towel.

"Th-Thanks. I worked up a lot of sweat from all the practice we had today, ehehe☆ I'd better take a bath too."

Feeling embarrassed to be saying that, I look away.

And the envelope from UTX comes into my view again.

My body automatically stops. I'm not sure what I should say.

So I don't say anything at all.

And, Yuki also looks down without saying anything.

...  
...  
...

"Well..."

"Er..."

I was just a moment faster.

I can't help but smile.

"Hooray, I win!"



That's a game that we made up when we were little. Only the two of us know it. When things are really awkward, the first person to speak their mind wins. That's because we want to always have a strong sisterly bond. Because even in hard and painful times, we always want to be able to hear each other out. It's an unspoken promise we made together, although nobody knows exactly when it was made.

By the way, as of right now, I'm winning by a huge margin! Such is the power of a big sister♪

In the Kousaka family, being book smart or being athletic isn't as important as being honest and true to your feelings! Yeah!

"Aw, that's no fair! You're just acting on instinct all the time!"

Yukiho acts upset, but her eyes are smiling. Phew, it's usual Yukiho.

"Well... It's about this..."

I point to the envelope.

"Just so you know, I didn't exactly go out and ask for one of those, okay?" Yukiho pouts and looks away, but she continues talking. "This morning, we had a trial enrollment as part of a school event. You know, the trial high-school enrollment for the graduating third-years that happens every year. All of us went over to UTX and sat in mock classes, watched an A-RISE concert, and were treated to an assortment of other things. They were trying to recruit us hard, you know."

Yukiho sat down at the table, grabbed a monaka from the snack tray, peeled off the cellophane wrapper, and started eating it.

Yeesh, right before dinner, too. It's rare seeing the usually well-behaved Yukiho doing this.

"That school, it really is as amazing as they say. Look in the enrollment guide. They even gave us an A-RISE DVD and strap."

Holding the monaka in her mouth, Yukiho takes the DVD out of the envelope to let me see.

I gaze over at Yukiho... Oh, that's an Anju strap, how cute. Then, I remember something.

"Hey, Otonokizaka Middle's trial enrollment, didn't they always do that at Otonokizaka Academy before!? Why would a public school like Oto Middle have a trial enrollment at the UTX, the private school for rich kids?"

"Well, Otonoki's shutting down, isn't it?"

Urk. A knot forms in my throat.

"I didn't want to tell you this, but by the time we go there... Or rather, by the time we're your age, Otonokizaka Academy's will be as good as gone. The teachers at Oto Middle are saying the matter's already been settled."

No way... And even if it were, Otonoki's still here for now.

We still have three years of reprieve.

"If Otonoki were going to stay around forever, I'd still have a choice, but as a matter of fact, Otonokizaka Academy is going to close applications next year, isn't it?"

"They... haven't finalized the decision to close applications just yet," I say, my voice gradually shrinking.

"Yeah, but I doubt anyone is going to enroll knowing that they can't stay around until graduation, though. Not even I could do something that stupid."



Crunch, crunch. Yukiho avoids looking at me as she unwraps another monaka and starts eating it.

That's the first time I've seen Yukiho eat two monaka in a row...

"Hey, it's gonna be okay, Yukkii! μ's and I are going to do our total, absolute best, and we'll definitely stop the school from closing! We're not the only ones who don't want our school to shut down. They're all good girls, they just give up a bit too quickly. I'm sure everyone's going to be glad to know there's girls like you who want to enroll."

In my panic, that's all I can say.

"All of us are going to keep on doing our best, and we'll stop our school from closing! So, please don't go to UTX! Come to Otonoki Academy ins-"

Yukiho's eyes snap toward me.

"I'll keep doing my best..."

Her eyes...

They're filled with translucent tears.

"You can't... You can't do this to me. I... I wanted to go to Otonoki, just like you! I wanted to wear the same uniform as Grandma and Mom and you, and take a picture of us as a family! But... But I'm going to be the only one who can't do that. I hate it. I hate it, but there's nothing I can do about it!"

"Yukkii..."

Yukkii is right.  
There's nothing we can do.  
All I could do was hold Yukkii's head against my chest as she bawled.  
Her warm tears soaked into the chest of my uniform.  
My thin summer dress shirt grew damp with Yukkii's tears.  
I'm sorry, Yukiho.  
I'm sorry for only thinking of myself.  
Yukiho's always acting cool, so I thought she was serious when she was bluffing about how much cooler and richer UTX was. I never even realized Yukiho didn't mean a word of it.  
I'm sorry.  
I'm really sorry.  
But...  
There's one thing.  
One thing that I want you to know.  
I've never given up on the dream of us going to Otonoki together, you know?  
I'm not good at hiding my true feelings like you are.  
That's why I've been so open about wanting you to come to Otonoki.  
No, not just you. I want all the girls living around Otonokizaka to come to Otonoki.

♡♡♡♡♡

On that night, for the first time in a while, Yukiho and I sleep in the same bed.  
When we were little, we'd often end up like this after messing around.  
Together, we'd often wonder if we'd have the same dreams if we shared a bed, but Yukiho usually dreamed of princesses, while I either dreamt of kaiju, or just forgot what I dreamt about altogether, and we never had the same dream even once.  
But, just for tonight,  
I hope we can have the same dream.

A dream where Otonokizaka Academy doesn't shut down.  
A dream where Yukiho and I wear the same uniform and say, "See you later!" as we head out in the morning.  
And tomorrow, I'll be doing what I can to make that dream come true.  
It might not be much, but I'll do whatever I can.  
I'll be doing my best with the school idols of μ's.  
For the sake of our beloved school, and for the people dear to us.

May our dreams come true!

And for now, good night.  
I hope to have a good dream tonight.  
I love Otonokizaka Academy more than anything else in the world♡

Comments♡Hanayo

Honoka and her little sister Yukiho are the two poster girls of the long-standing Homura. Their personalities are completely different, and yet they're so close. As





someone without any sisters of my own, I've always been jealous of them♡ Yukiho's cute, and responsible, and I think she'd definitely make a great idol, so I hope she'll be able to enroll in Otonoki and join μ's!